



# The Frontline Supervisor

June 2021

**Q. I notice some firefighters are resistance to self-referral to the EAP. Confidentiality concerns a few, but others think asking for help will tarnish their macho image. How can I help reduce this resistance?**

A. To overcome myths and misconceptions about EAPs and getting help, mention the EAP to your personnel often, and have periodic awareness programs arranged by or with EAP staff. Encourage use of the program. Making the EAP “ever present” and attempt to have personnel see it as part of the “fire culture.” This will have significant impact on reducing resistance to using the program. In effect, this type of visibility has a marketing effect that normalizes the idea of getting help. Regarding your role as a supervisor, be careful about language. If you are involved in a “bad call” or a horrific event, model reaching out to personnel, follow critical incident stress management protocols, and don’t make statements that reinforce the macho mentality among personnel, like “Suck it up, it’s your job.” Be aware of the role alcohol plays among personnel, and how it is used to manage stress within your department. Discuss with the EAP strategies that educate about and encourage healthy behaviors for managing stress.

**Q. There are hundreds of resources on becoming a better supervisor, but who has time to read this stuff and incorporate it into one’s supervision style? I think supervisors often must muddle through with trial and error until we learn how to be supervisors, right?**

A. Much supervisory skill development is by trial and error, but a key growth strategy is also mentorship, formal and informal, early in one’s career. A recent study showed that those who spent a few quiet moments each morning thinking about leadership and reflecting on their experiences, strengths, and goals for improvement actually advanced their leadership abilities. Look at the following questions that study participants were asked to consider. Participate in your own study with the same questions and see if your leadership skills advance. Ask: What are some of your proudest leadership moments? What qualities do you have that make you a good leader or will in the future? Think about whom you aspire to be as a leader, and then imagine everything has gone as well as it possibly could in this leader role. What does that look like? What effect do you want to have on your employees? Do you want to motivate them? Inspire them? Identify and develop their talents? What skills or traits do you have that can help with those goals? Source: [www.news.ufl.edu/2021/04/best-leader-self/](http://www.news.ufl.edu/2021/04/best-leader-self/)

**Q. What is “upward bullying”?**

**A.** Upward bullying is a term that refers to subordinates who treat bosses with disrespect. Behaviors of “upward bullies” may include inappropriately correcting the boss, nagging the boss to obtain something they desire, or intimidating the boss in some manner to be the one who has the power and control in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Regaining control in a supervisory relationship with an upward bullying employee requires reestablishing effective and appropriate authority by leveraging your assertiveness skills and obtaining assurances from next-level managers that your efforts will be supported. Often upward bullying employees establish relationships with next-level supervisors. These relationships may then be used to empower a bully’s willingness to take more risks with inappropriate communications with the boss, as they may believe consequences for their behavior are unlikely given their friendship with this other manager. If you believe, you have lost control of the supervisory relationship with your subordinate employee, contact the EAP to work on a plan for reestablishing an appropriate balance of the power in the relationship.

**Q. During a Memorial Day party I saw my DOT employee at a distance smoking a joint. He has a regulated, safety-sensitive position. I pretended not to notice, but now that I am back at work, I must act on our policy and refer to testing. I fear this is going to cause quite an upset.**

**A.** Your employee may be upset about a confrontation, but it is he who placed you in the position of having to make a referral for a reasonable suspicion test. Being friends and socializing with employees happens with great frequency but also with risk, because a “dual relationship” of friend and boss may potentially interfere with one’s ability to act, as in this case, on a drug-free workplace policy. Smoking marijuana will cause an employee to test positive for up to 30 days. If you saw a worker smoking pot in the company parking lot, you would also be obligated to act. You have personal knowledge of drug use, so do not allow a potentially toxic employee to risk the lives of others. Still anxious and nervous? Speak to the EAP if you have time before the next work shift so you can process your decision and gain fortitude to act.

**Q. I referred my employee to the EAP, but he says he will not go because his neighbors work in the same office building and he might get spotted, thereby losing his confidentiality. This sounds like a good excuse. What can I do to persuade him to go?**

**A.** EAPs are familiar with the unusual circumstances that may cause a few employees to be hesitant about visiting the program office. Phone the EAP and discuss this situation. The EAP will then tell you what to recommend. Some EAPs will discuss personal problems with an employee over the phone; others may meet select employees at a different location or meet after hours with the worker to decrease the likelihood of his or her crossing paths with someone who would possibly recognize the person’s reason for being on the premises.

**Questions? Call during business hours 815.748.8334, or after hours at 800.373.3327**